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# LAND USE

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Land Use element describes the distribution of existing land uses and the potential for future development and is perhaps the chapter of the Comprehensive Plan with which citizens are most familiar. The Land Use element identifies the policies that will guide the arrangement and intensity of future additions or changes to existing land use patterns. While residential densities and use characteristics are *generally* described in the Land Use element, *specific* standards, such as minimum lot sizes and permitted uses, are designated in the County's Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map.

Located on a peninsula formed by the James and York Rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, York County consists of approximately 108 square miles (69,435 acres), approximately 36% of which is owned by the federal government. Another 10% of the County's land area is watershed property owned by the cities of Newport News and Williamsburg, each of which owns reservoirs in the County. While presenting a number of constraints for the County, these landholdings also ensure that a relatively large amount of open space will be perpetuated, thus contributing to the County's quality of life and the perception of a rural atmosphere.

York County is primarily a residential community, with concentrated commercial development along major arterial highways. The Amoco refinery and Virginia Power Plant, located in the Goodwin Neck/Seaford area, constitute the County's industrial base. Although the basic land use patterns in the County are the same in 1998 as in 1991 when the Comprehensive Plan was adopted, there have been some important trends and changes in land use and factors that influence land use:

- Residential development, particularly single-family detached but also townhouses and duplexes, has continued to be strong, although the annual number of units built has decreased each year since 1992. The *cluster* or *open space subdivision* development has become the typical technique used because of its flexibility and its attractiveness in dealing with the difficult characteristics of environmentally sensitive or infill development sites.
- The County has begun to emerge as a retail commercial destination with the development of several large-scale commercial projects, most notably the Village Square Center (Super Kmart) on Victory Boulevard and the 135,000-square foot Lowe's Home Center on East Rochambeau Drive.
- The new Grafton High/Middle School on Grafton Drive has created a major community activity center and, in conjunction with several new residential developments and programmed improvements to Grafton Drive, seems to be creating renewed interest in the Grafton commercial area, which was once "downtown" York County.
- The Interstate 64/Route 199 interchange area in the vicinity of Water Country USA is poised to become a major activity center. The development potential of the area has been enhanced by the acquisition of the approximately 900-acre "Whittaker's Mill" property (and Water Country) by the Anheuser-Busch Corporation. This has infused significant capital resources and heightened the development potential of the area.
- The completion of Route 199 between Interstate 64 and Route 60 parallel to Lightfoot Road has created a major commercial corridor for the County. The County has developed a water system to serve the area, and sewer service is also available. Some new development has occurred but the full potential of the area is yet to be realized. With the completion of the interchange at International Parkway and the International Parkway/Mooretown Road connection to the Bypass Road corridor set to occur in the next several years, this area also is poised to become a major enhancement to the County's non-residential tax base.

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## SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

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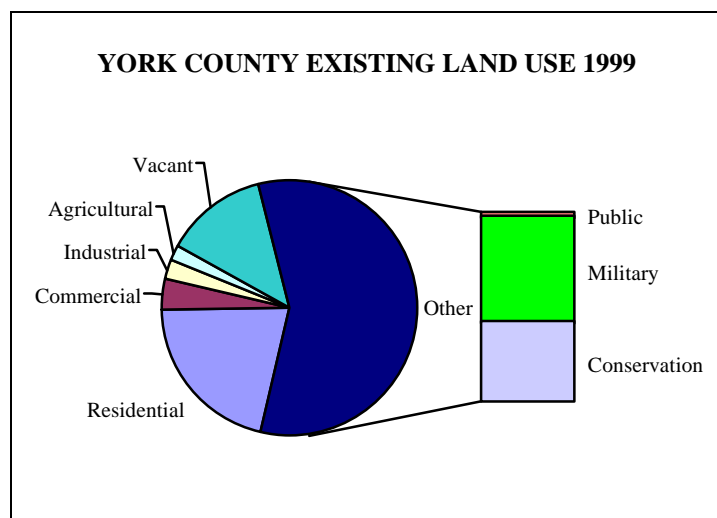
The 1999 Existing Land Use Map shows the distribution of land uses throughout the County while **Figure 18** depicts graphically the distribution by type of use. In these discussions, *gross area* means all of the land area in the County, while *non-military* land area excludes all military installations and *gross developable* land area excludes both military and recreation/conservation land. Gross developable land area is slightly under half (45%) of the County's gross land area and includes both developed and vacant land. Gross developable land area as used in the discussion in this section also includes areas that, because of environmental characteristics (wetlands and slopes, for example) or other factors, might not be developable.

Direct comparisons between the existing land use data for 1991 and 1999 are highly misleading because the development of the County's Geographic Information System, which has taken place since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 1991, has tremendously improved the accuracy of land use data. It should also be noted that Virginia Department of Transportation rights-of-way are not included in the acreage calculations.

### Residential

There are approximately 14,000 acres of residentially developed land in the County, 96% of it single-family detached. This represents an increase of over 2,000 residential acres since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 1991. Residential development, particularly medium- and high-density single-family as well as multi-family, tends to be located in areas with public utilities and convenient access to major thoroughfares.

Multi-family residential development includes townhouses and duplexes, apartments (both condominium and rental), and federally owned multi-family units. Multi-family development occupies approximately 600 acres or 1.3% of the County's non-military land area.



**Figure 18**

### Commercial

The 2,600 acres devoted to commercial land uses in 1999 represent 5.8% of the County's non-military land area. Most commercial activities have developed in a linear fashion along Routes 17 and 171 in the lower County and Routes 143 and 60 in the upper County.

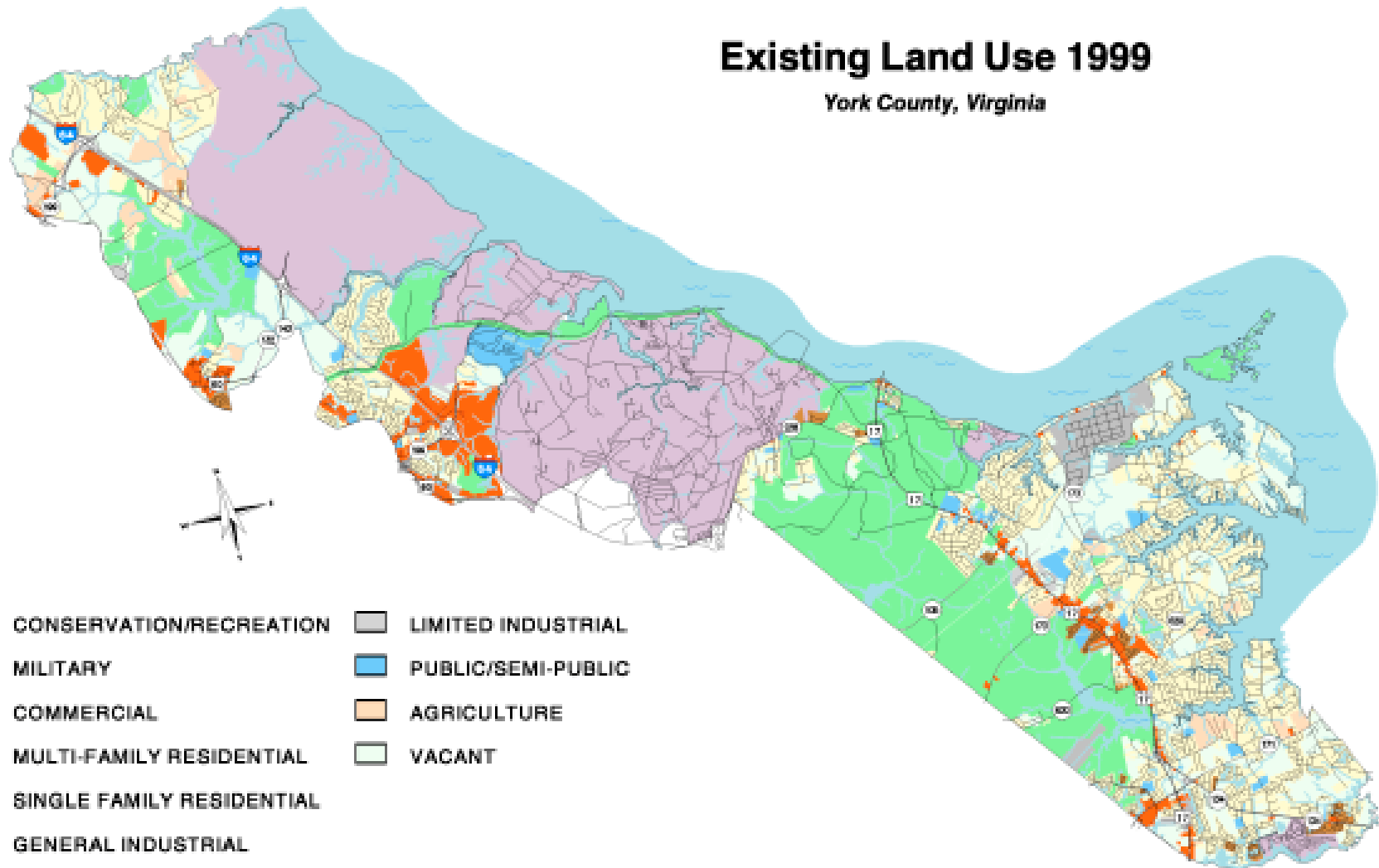
### Industrial

The 1,500 acres devoted to industrial land uses represent 3.4% of the County's non-military land area. The great majority of this industrial land area is used by the Amoco oil refinery and the Virginia Power generating plant. Also included in the General Industrial category for the purposes of this analysis are the numerous junkyards at the southern end of the Route 17 corridor. This categorization is based primarily on the impact – such as noise, dust, odor, traffic, and visual appearance – of these activities on their surroundings.

Limited Industrial activities are scattered throughout the County and are in many cases located in the midst of commercially-zoned areas. Examples include the Greene, Bethel, Victory, and Ewell industrial parks.

# Existing Land Use 1999

York County, Virginia



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|---------------------------|--------------------|
| CONSERVATION/RECREATION   | LIMITED INDUSTRIAL |
| MILITARY                  | PUBLIC/SEMI-PUBLIC |
| COMMERCIAL                | AGRICULTURE        |
| MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL  | VACANT             |
| SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL |                    |
| GENERAL INDUSTRIAL        |                    |

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Prepared by: York County  
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## **Public/Semi-Public**

Public and semi-public uses consume a total of 1,220 acres, or 2.7% of the non-military land area. Included in the public classification are the County schools, fire stations, and office buildings, the State-operated Victory Center at Yorktown, post offices, and the Commonwealth of Virginia's Emergency Fuel Depot property near Cheatham Annex; the semi-public classification consists primarily of churches.

## **Military**

Military landholdings include the Bethel Manor military housing complex, the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve Training Center, the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, the Cheatham Annex Naval Supply Center, and Camp Peary. As previously noted, this vast amount of military property exerts a major influence on land use and development patterns in York County. Most notable is the fact that the Naval Weapons Station “divides” the County into its “upper” and “lower” portions.

## **Open Space**

For the purposes of this analysis, Open Space has been divided into the following three sub-categories:

- **Recreation and Conservation areas:** This category includes County and non-County parks and the holdings of the Newport News and Williamsburg Waterworks (Harwoods Mill, Lee Hall, and Waller Mill watersheds). These 15,470 acres represent 34.7% of the County's non-military land area.
- **Agriculture:** Commercially productive agricultural activities account for an estimated 1,300 acres or 2.9% of the County's non-military land area. In general, agricultural activities in York County contribute more to the perception of a rural atmosphere than they do to the County's economic base.
- **Vacant:** Vacant and undeveloped, privately controlled land comprises 8,660 acres, or 19.4% of the County's non-military land area.

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## **CITIZEN INPUT AND PLANNING POLICIES**

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Based on the results of the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Input Process, York County's citizens are somewhat concerned about the rate of residential growth in the County and feel it should be controlled. As noted in the Housing element, they support the continuation of the current maximum build-out population. Economic development, in contrast, should be encouraged, provided that it does not come at the expense of the natural environment or of zoning requirements that regulate signage, landscaping and other aesthetic features of development. Such development should be well-buffered from residential areas, although small neighborhood businesses may be permissible in proximity to residential neighborhoods.

Not just the type but the quality of development is also important to the citizens, 80% or more of whom feel that landscaping should be required in all new residential, commercial, and industrial development.

The one adjective that is probably used more than any other to describe York County is “rural.” In fact, most residents who were not born in the County say that they moved to York County to get away from more urban environments. They like the fact that York County is less “built up” than other communities. They like the slower pace, the lush vegetation, the open space, the less congested atmosphere. York County tends to attract more than its share of families with children because it is a good environment for raising children. This is nothing new, and it is certainly not unique to York County. The post-World War II settlement pattern across the United States has been characterized by migration out of the central cities into the suburbs and beyond, into the so-called “exurbs.”

The New College Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary defines rural as follows:

1. Of or pertaining to the country as opposed to the city; rustic.
2. Of or pertaining to people who live in the country
3. Of or relating to farming; agricultural.

The dictionary identifies *arcadian*, *rustic*, *pastoral*, and *sylvan* as some of the synonyms for rural. According to the dictionary, “These adjectives are all descriptive of existence or environment which is close to nature . . . *Rural* applies to sparsely settled or agricultural country, as distinct from settled communities. *Arcadian* implies ideal or simple country living . . . *Rustic*, sometime uncomplimentary, applies to country people who seem unsophisticated, but may also apply favorably to living conditions or to natural environment which are pleasingly primitive. *Pastoral* implies the supposed peace of rural living and the shepherd’s life, with a suggestion of artificiality. *Sylvan* refers to wooded as opposed to cultivated country, and carries the sense of unspoiled beauty.”

There are elements of these definitions that apply to the citizens’ vision of York County as encompassed in the word “rural”. Certainly they seek a living environment that is “close to nature” with “wooded country” and a “sense of unspoiled beauty.” They also favor the generally “sparsely settled” or low-density residential development pattern, which promotes the “peace of rural living.”

Whether this “rural” character can be maintained in the face of continual development, and whether a balance can be struck between the citizens’ right to a high quality of life and landowners’ rights to develop their property are the sorts of challenges that were addressed in the 1991 Comprehensive Plan, which states that the following characteristics contribute to the perception of a “rural” character in the County:

- Retention of natural physical features,
- Retention of forest and woodland areas, both along roadways and within developed areas,
- Protection of existing agricultural areas,
- Protection or installation of landscaping and open space in all development, and
- Protection or enhancement of open space areas at strategic, highly visible locations throughout the County.

This is still as true in 1998 as it was in 1991, and, thanks largely to the approach the County has taken in its development rules and regulations – most notably the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances – measures are in place to ensure that the County can continue to develop without losing these rural characteristics. These measures include tree preservation standards, landscaping requirements, lower residential densities, larger lots, open space requirements in housing developments, greenbelts along major roadways, and natural resource management and protection standards. The citizens affirmed their support for these measures during the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Input Process, expressing strong support for protecting the environment, controlling residential growth and maintaining the 87,000 maximum build-out, enhancing the appearance of major commercial corridors, and providing landscaping in all new development. In addition, there are several large land areas in the County – including watershed property, the National Park Service property, Camp Peary, and the Naval Weapons Station – that will not likely be opened for private development and contribute to the perception of “rural” character by providing large amounts of contiguous vegetated open space.

Although “rural” probably is not the best word to describe a county that, with 500 persons per square mile, is the sixth most densely populated county in Virginia, many of the things people think of as rural – trees, open space, and low densities – are still applicable to York County and, through appropriate development techniques, can be maintained without causing undue hardship on the landowners.

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## A VISION FOR LAND USE

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**Land use in the County should contribute to the perception of a rural character in accordance with the carrying capacity of the land and present and planned infrastructure.**

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### LAND USE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

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**1 Provide for orderly residential growth that would allow the County population to reach a maximum of approximately 80,000 persons.**

1.1 Establish maximum residential densities as follows:

Single-Family:

- Low Density 1.0 dwelling unit per acre
- Medium Density 1.75 dwelling units per acre
- High Density 3.0 dwelling units per acre

Multi-Family: 10.0 units per acre

1.2 Revise the Zoning Ordinance and Map as necessary to conform with the 2015 Land Use Map.

1.3 Continue to require lower residential development densities in areas where public utilities are not available.

**2 Maintain a balanced diversity of land uses, with minimal conflicts among different uses, in recognition of the physical characteristics of the County and the inherent capacity of the land to host different types of uses.**

2.1 Apply the appropriate land use density (units per acre) and intensity (type of use) to each parcel in the County based on the property's physical characteristics and the present or planned availability of public infrastructure, facilities, and services.

2.2 In evaluating rezoning and use permit requests, consider the potential impact of the proposed development on public facilities, services, and infrastructure as well as potential fiscal impacts.

2.3 Guide specific types and densities of development to specific areas of the County through planning, zoning, and utility extension policies.

2.4 Use all available tools and techniques to defer all or part of permitted development until such time as adequate public infrastructure is in place to support the development, and seek enabling legislation to expand the County's authority in this regard.

2.5 Use the capital improvement programming process to plan and fund utility and transportation improvements that will guide industrial and commercial development to areas designated for such uses.

2.6 Prepare an annual report describing the development activity during the year, including land use patterns, rezonings, use permits, site plans, subdivision, wetlands and land disturbing permits, capital improvements programming, and the conformance of this activity with the Comprehensive Plan.

**3 Consider development patterns and plans established in adjoining jurisdictions when making local land use decisions and designations.**

- 3.1 Maintain “compatibility zones” in areas adjoining jurisdictional boundaries to provide for comparable zoning and development patterns
- 4 Preserve open space throughout the County such that these areas will become an integral part of the community.**
  - 4.1 Use conservation easements, clustering, and other techniques to preserve open space.
  - 4.2 Where appropriate, assist in making conservation areas accessible to citizens through the development of greenways, trails, and similar facilities.
- 5 Preserve and protect certain lands near the shoreline that have intrinsic value for the protection of water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.**
  - 5.1 Encourage the use of cluster development techniques for all new residential development located within the Environmental Management Area Overlay District.
- 6 Preserve, protect, and enhance cultural, environmental, and historic areas.**
  - 6.1 Implement an historic zoning district classification as enabled by the Code of Virginia to preserve and protect the historic and architectural character of Yorktown, with particular attention to the Revolutionary War battlefields and the waterfront.
  - 6.2 Enhance public awareness and recognition of York County’s role in the Civil War through the identification and preservation of significant sites.
  - 6.3 Require the identification of any and all significant historic sites on all subdivision and site plans and, to the extent practical, require the protection of such sites, depending on the extent of their significance, throughout the development process.
  - 6.4 Maintain higher standards of development at major gateways into historic Yorktown and Colonial Williamsburg, including the Colonial Parkway, Cook Road, Goosley Road, Route 17 (north of Cook Road), Pocahontas Trail, Route 143 west of Queen Creek, Route 132, Bypass Road, and Richmond Road.
  - 6.5 For any development in close proximity to the Colonial Parkway, require adequate buffers to preserve the scenic vistas from that roadway.
  - 6.6 Designate the scenic vistas along the Colonial Parkway as a “corridor protection” area as enabled by the Code of Virginia.
- 7 Enhance the visual appeal of the County’s major corridors, particularly the Route 17 corridor.**
  - 7.1 Use the following tools to improve the Route 17 Corridor:
    - preserve and protect existing mature trees to the extent feasible,
    - establish new landscaped areas within the right-of-way as well as within existing and new development,
    - maximize building setbacks so as to provide opportunities for incorporation of green areas in highly visible areas and the retention of appropriate amounts of green space in the event of right-of-way expansion,
    - establish appropriate standards to ensure visually attractive signage, display, and storage associated with business activity, and

- require the underground placement of new utilities and encourage the underground placement of existing utilities.
- 7.2 Maintain greenbelt requirements of appropriate widths to preserve trees and rural vistas along the following highways:
- Victory Boulevard (Route 171) east of Hampton Highway
  - Hampton Highway (Route 134)
  - Route 132
  - Route 199 in Lightfoot
  - Denbigh Boulevard (Route 173)
  - Fort Eustis Boulevard (Route 105) and extension
- 7.3 Require the installation of “street trees” along new roads.
- 7.4 Extend the streetscape improvements made by the City of Williamsburg along Second Street into York County.
- 7.5 Encourage the adaptive reuse of existing blighted properties.

## **8 Protect unspoiled vistas and views of the water.**

Restrict deepwater ports to existing facilities and do not encourage expansion of industrially-related deepwater activities